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SUBJECT: HONG KONG JUNE 4 CANDLELIGHT VIGIL: SHINE ON

Classified By: Consul General Joe Donovan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: As many as 150,000 people attended Hong Kong's annual June 4 candlelight vigil, a number not seen since the first vigil here in 1990. Observers believe the significance of the twentieth anniversary of June 4 was the key factor bringing back those whose attendance had lapsed. Chief Executive Tsang's verbal gaffes seeking to downplay the June 4 incident, refusals by immigration authorities to admit activists to Hong Kong, and the publication of Zhao Ziyang's memoir also provided useful "advertisements" for the vigil. While organizers met their goal of ensuring a high turnout by young people, debate over how to teach June 4 as a school subject continues. Pan-democrats admit they will not get these numbers on the street July 1, but still hope to better their turnout from last year. End summary and comment.

¶2. (U) Annually since 1990, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China (the Alliance) has organized a candlelight vigil in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to commemorate June 4 and call on the PRC government to rectify its decision on the democracy movement. The Alliance also organizes an annual march from Victoria Park to Hong Kong's government offices in Central. With the exception of a small vigil in held in recent years in Macau, these events represents the only commemoration of June 4 anywhere on PRC soil.

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¶3. (C) South China Morning Post (SCMP) Editor-at-Large Chris Yeung told us before the May 31 march that the real drive to participate for most people would be the significance of the 20th anniversary. People who had let their participation lapse would feel moved to take a stand, and many people would bring their children. That said, four additional factors may have served to focus people's attention on the issue and motivate them to join the vigil.

¶4. (C) First, amidst a drive on most of Hong Kong's university campuses to drum up interest in June 4 among students (many of whom were not yet born in 1989), University of Hong Kong (HKU) Student Union President Ayo Chan made a verbal gaffe April 7 in which he suggested irrational decisions made by the students under Chai Ling's leadership were a contributor to the bloodshed. Subsequent attempts to put his remarks into context and stress his commitment to the rectification of the verdict on June 4 went unheard, and he was ousted in a student-led recall election April 24.

¶5. (C) Second was the May 14 gaffe by Chief Executive (CE) Donald Tsang in a question session with the Legislative Council (LegCo). Asked by Civic Party Legislator Margaret Ng whether he supported vindication of the student movement, Tsang said:

"I understand Hong Kong people's feelings about June 4, but the incident happened many years ago. The country's development in many areas has since achieved tremendous results and brought economic prosperity to Hong Kong. I believe Hong Kong people will make an objective assessment of the nation's development."

Ng pressed Tsang, asking whether he intended to say China's subsequent development meant the incident should be ignored. In response, Tsang then made what proved to be the greater gaffe:

"My view represents the opinion of Hong Kong people in general, and the opinion of citizens has affected my view."

With that, the pan-democrats stormed out of the session. The next day, in what proved to be a failed damage control exercise, Tsang's people claimed that Tsang had made a slip of the tongue, and Tsang himself apologized for claiming to represent the views of Hong Kong people on June 4.

¶6. (C) Third was the decision by Hong Kong booksellers to move up the date of release of former General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's memoirs. The English version, "Prisoner of the State," went on sale (and promptly sold out) in Hong Kong May ¶19. Zhao's condemnation of the "illegal" method of deciding to clear Tiananmen Square and his expressed support for China's embracing parliamentary democracy poured fuel into the growing Tiananmen debate.

¶7. (C) If any final reminder was needed, the May 30 decision by Hong Kong Immigration to deny entry to Danish sculptor

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ens Galschiot, the artist who produced Hong Kong's "Pillar of Shame" Tiananmen memorial and who was reviously denied entry during the Olympic periodin 2008, served well enough. His banning, and tht of now-AmCit student leader Xiang Xiaoji June stand in stark contrast to the still-nexplained decision to admit former leader (and current U.S. Army Chaplain) Xiong Yan, who went on to be a headliner in both the march and vigil.

By the Numbers

¶8. (C) Vigil organizers the Alliance had their first positive indications about support for Tiananmen vindication at the protest march May 31. While the estimated 8,000 participants was not a huge figure, Alliance leader (and legislator) Lee Cheuk-yan pronounced himself satisfied, telling us essentially, "the big turnout will be the vigil." (Note: Hong Kong police estimated 4,700, but hedged this as an estimate of those who formed up in Victoria Park prior to the march rather than a total participation figure. End note.) 8,000 is eight times the estimated number of participants in the 2008 march, veteran pan-democrat Martin Lee told us. Alliance contacts earlier told us they absolutely needed to exceed 2008's Alliance-estimated 48,000 (Police: 15,700) attendance at the vigil, 6iQQj:c.HQ

¶9. (C) As of this morning, English-language media seemed to be embracing Alliance estimates of up to 150,000 participants, while also reporting police estimates of 62,800. Comment: Our unscientific formula of comparing the area of Victoria Park's athletic fields covered in preparation for the July 1, 2008 march (organizer-estimated participation 47,000) against the area we saw covered last night leads us to support the Alliance figure. End comment.

Staying on Message

¶10. (C) Given the proliferation of causes now being advanced

under the increasingly catch-all rubric of the July 1 "democracy" march, the unity of message on May 31 and June 4 was notable. Contacts had assured us that "June 4 is June 4", and that would be the focus. The only departures from this uniformity were the efforts by the Democratic (DPHK) and Civic Parties to link support for rectification of the June 4 verdict to the struggle for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. In addition, the Civics and the League of Social Democrats (LSD) both whipped up the crowds against CE Tsang. The Civics offered t-shirts which said "Donald Tsang doesn't represent me" (a reference to Tsang's claim to represent the views of Hong Kong people on June 4). The more raucous LSD led chants of "Donald Tsang, drop dead!" (a reference to a Cantonese vulgarity the LSD had been criticized for using in the LegCo chamber during remarks by the Administration).

¶11. (C) Alliance leader Szeto Wah told us the march and vigil themselves represented an unspoken message by Hong Kong people in support of one country, two systems. By holding these events, which cannot be held on the Mainland, Szeto believes the people are underscoring the importance to them of Hong Kong's special status.

The Kids Are Alright

¶12. (C) Organizers like Szeto Wah have been stressing the importance of making sure Hong Kong's children are taught the lessons of June 4, so that the memory in Hong Kong does not fade. LegCo members, led by DPHK Education Functional Constituency legislator Cheung Man-kwong, have been vocally critical of the Education Bureau's unwillingness to make June 4 a part of the approved Chinese history curriculum. (Note: Although not a required subject, and although textbook coverage is spotty, the Education Bureau has stressed that classroom teachers are free both to teach the subject and to point students toward additional reference materials. End note.) University students participating in a pre-vigil 64-hour hunger strike told us they had learned nothing in school about June 4, but also seemed to find it easy enough to learn what they needed from their parents or the internet. SCMP's Yeung had told us students might have a difficult time getting a clear understanding of June 4 given the amount of Mainland-produced material competing with other sources, but the students gave us the impression they had not found it difficult to separate facts from propaganda.

¶13. (C) Numbers of students and young people in both the

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march and the vigil were visibly high, and contacts suggested the rate of participation was far above that of previous years. Pan-democratic LegCo member Cyd Ho told us she saw a whole group of Baptist University social science students hold a "sharing session" (group discussion) immediately after the vigil, after which they sang a re-worked version of their residence hall cheer with June 4 themes in the lyrics. Hunger-striking students boasted to us that 92 percent of HKU students voted in a campus referendum to support vindication of the '89 student movement, although they also admitted that the participation rate was about 20 percent.

See You July 1

¶14. (C) While the march and vigil are eloquent testament to Hong Kong people's views on June 4, whether the pan-democrats can translate this into feet on the streets for the July 1 democracy march -- their real show of strength as Hong Kong considers its next stage of democratic reforms this fall -- remains to be seen. SCMP's Yeung told us there are people who support vindication of June 4, including people who fled the Mainland, who might not normally come out July 1. Asked, legislator Cyd Ho said definitively she did not expect

anything like the June 4 numbers to turn up July 1, although she hoped to exceed 2008's figure.
DONOVAN